

# Zero Marking in English as Lingua Franca Interactions: Corpus IST-Erasmus

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## **Abstract**

*This study introduces the marking system for 3<sup>rd</sup> person present tense in English as Lingua Franca interactions. It is a corpus study which is compiled as part of a PhD study to investigate the lexico-grammatical characteristics of ELF. The corpus, Corpus IST-Erasmus, consists of 10 hours 47 minutes of recorded ELF interactions. It is compiled by means of 54 speech events with the participation of 79 Erasmus students in Istanbul, representing 24 diverse L1s. The focus of this paper is to present whether there are variations from standardized ENL forms with respect to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person present tense marking, as proposed in previous ELF research. The results indicate that the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero in place of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s is becoming an emerging pattern in ELF interactions.*

## **Keywords**

*English as a Lingua Franca, ELF interactions, Corpus IST-Erasmus, ELF lexico-grammar, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular zero marking*

## **1. Introduction**

The interest in ELF research is a result of the unprecedented global spread of English. In parallel with the increase in the use of English as lingua franca around the world, variations have been observed in the English used by ELF speakers. Many studies have been conducted to reveal the characteristics of written and spoken ELF interactions. Some of the studies shed light on lexico-grammar of ELF (Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004; Dewey, 2007a; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Breitedener, 2009). Some are related to the phonology (Jenkins, 2000; Walker, 2010) and pragmatics of ELF (Björkman, 2011a; Firth, 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997; House, 1999, 2002; Mauranten, 2006a, 2006b). Although the focus of these studies is diverse, all reveal the emerging patterns and characteristics of ELF discourse.

Drawing mostly on the emerging patterns in Seidlhofer (2004), Dewey (2007a) investigated the lexico-grammatical features of spoken ELF interactions by compiling a 61,234 word corpus. The corpus consists of 42 speech events including not only naturally occurring informal conversations but also semi-formal seminar presentations. The number of participants in the study is 55, with 17 L1s represented. The purpose of the study was to identify the innovative lexico-grammatical structures that emerged in spoken ELF discourse. The findings of Dewey's study, which he later developed in his

subsequent works (Cogo & Dewey, 2012), contributed to the studies on the description of ELF lexico-grammar.

Breiteneder (2009) is another researcher interested in ELF lexico-grammar. She specifically investigated the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> -s using the professional-organizational domain of VOICE as database. The findings revealed that in 126 out of 151 occurrences of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular contexts, the verbs are inflectionally marked, and in 25 contexts they are unmarked. The findings of her study reveal that the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s *“follows general principles of language usage that have been observed in numerous varieties of English around the globe and indicate affinities between ELF and various world Englishes (WEs)”* (p. 256).

As for the pragmatics of ELF, Firth (1996) in a small scale corpus investigated the telephone conversations of two Danish trading companies. The focus of the study was to examine the use of communicative strategies in ELF interactions. With respect to the findings, Firth (1996, p. 243) states that *“participants demonstrate a remarkable ability to systematically and contingently—and on the basis of quintessentially local considerations—attend and disattend to a range of anomalies and infelicities in their unfolding interaction”*. Besides, Firth puts forward that participants either “let it pass” or pretend that they have understood when actually they do not. Moreover, they tend to tolerate *“anomalous usage and marked linguistic behavior”*. While turn-taking, sequential relations, and topic management appear commonly in the conversations, “other-repair” and “other-completion” appear less frequently. Finally, Firth notes that even when there are abnormalities in the interactions, participants *“do interactional work to imbue talk with orderly and ‘normal’ characteristics”* (p. 256).

Having worked on spoken ELF interactions, House (1999) and Kaur (2011) conducted research on different pragmatic issues. Investigating the conversations of international students, House proposes that communication breakdowns are not frequent in ELF interactions. At times when they occur, instead of negotiating meanings, ELF speakers tend to change the topic or “let it pass”. Kaur, on the other hand, collected 15 hours of spoken ELF interactions and conducted a conversational analysis. The purpose of her study was to investigate the notion of raising explicitness of expression. The participants of the study were 22 international graduate students from 13 different L1s. According to the findings, there is a tendency among ELF speakers in the study to use self-repair practices in order to make corrections, to be more explicit, and to achieve clarity in communication. As Kaur states, *“these practices are employed in anticipation of trouble that can occur as a result of the unpredictability and instability that accompany many ELF interactions”* (p. 2713).

As for research on ELF attitudes, Timmis (2002) investigated teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards adopting native-speaker norms. He collected approximately 600 questionnaire responses from 45 countries. The findings revealed that there is still a tendency among students (even among those that would not use English to communicate with native speakers) to conform to native-speaker norms. As Timmis (2002, p. 248) puts forward *“while the main motivation of the majority of the students is the ability to communicate, the rather traditional idea of ‘mastering a language’ survives, at least among a*

*minority*”. The teachers, on the other hand, “seem to be moving away from native-speaker norms faster than students are” (p. 248).

A similar study was conducted in the Turkish setting among ELT academia, pre-service and in-service English teachers to explore their attitude towards ELF by İnal and Özdemir (2012). The findings of the study conducted with 300 participants revealed that pre-service teachers embrace ELF significantly more than the academia and in-service teachers. They are inclined to question the validity of the normative perspective to English language teaching and believe that non-native speakers of English can use English for a variety of purposes just as well as native speakers and the way English is taught should reflect the needs and aspirations of non-native speakers who use it to communicate with other non-native speakers.

There are large-scale ELF corpora which aim to reveal the characteristics of and innovations in spoken and written ELF interactions. The first large-scale ELF corpus is VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English). It consists of one million word of naturally occurring spoken ELF interactions. Another large scale corpus is ELFA (the Corpus of English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings). This is, like VOICE, a corpus of spoken ELF interactions which consists of one million words. Besides this, the ELFA team compiled another corpus, WrELFA (The Corpus of Written English as Lingua Franca in Academic Settings), which is specifically based on written academic ELF interactions and consists of 774,000 words. A more recent large-scale ELF corpus is ACE (Asian Corpus of English), which also consists of one million words of naturally occurring spoken interactions.

There are also small-scale ELF corpora (Dewey, 2007a; Cogo, 2007; Prodromou, 2008) most of which are collected as part of doctoral studies. Dewey (2007a), as presented previously, investigated the lexico-grammatical features of spoken ELF interactions. Cogo (2007) examined the pragmatics of spoken ELF communication. She specifically aimed to analyze the degree of misunderstandings in ELF interactions, reveal the pragmatic strategies used by ELF speakers to ensure understanding, negotiate meaning, and support communication. The number of participants in Cogo’s corpus is 14, with 12 L1s represented. Cogo transcribed and examined 20 out of 50 hours of recorded data consisted of naturally occurring spoken interactions. Thereafter, Cogo and Dewey (2012) combined their corpora to investigate “how pragmatic motives and strategies give rise to lexicogrammatical innovation” (p. 4).

Prodromou (2008) investigated the role of idiomaticity in ELF interactions. He compiled a 200.000 word corpus of ELF communication; but, excluded 40.000 words of the corpus as they included L1 speakers of English. Thus, Prodromou created a 160.000 word subcorpus, which he called SUE (successful users of English). The corpus consists of naturally occurring informal conversations and informal interviews. The number of ELF speakers in the corpus is 42. Prodromou primarily aimed to identify the types of idiomaticity that L2 speakers have difficulty with, and the reasons for avoiding idiomaticity and having difficulty with it. Besides, he investigated whether L1 fluency differs from L2 fluency.

Although there is an increase in the number of empirical studies as presented above, there is still a gap

in the description of ELF discourse. In order to fully identify the characteristics of ELF, more corpora studies should be conducted. These studies will provide data for ELT professionals in designing an ELF-oriented pedagogy and materials.

This paper, which is a part of the dissertation “lexico-grammatical features of English as a Lingua Franca: a corpus-based study on spoken interactions”, aims to contribute to the growing body of ELF corpora. It specifically focuses on investigating the 3<sup>rd</sup> person present tense marking in English as Lingua Franca interactions. As pointed out in ELF literature (Seidlhofer, 2004; Breiteneder, 2009; Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Dewey, 2007a), the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular zero in place of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s is very common in English as Lingua Franca interactions. Cogo and Dewey (2012, p. 49) state that “*it is simply not the case that 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s is being ‘dropped’, but rather that 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s and 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero are competing variants in ELF interactions*”. Breiteneder (2009, p. 258) states that “[i]t is the idiosyncratic nature of the ‘3<sup>rd</sup> person -s’ together with the social importance it seems to carry in some countries and its disappearance in others, that makes it so intriguing, suggesting that this feature has a symptomatic significance beyond its apparent triviality”. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether 3<sup>rd</sup> person present tense marking show similar patterns in Corpus IST-Erasmus, as observed in previous ELF studies. To this end, the paper addresses the following research question:

*Does English as a lingua franca reveal any variations from standard ENL forms with respect to the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person present tense -s?*

## 2. Method

This is a corpus study which investigates the lexico-grammar of spoken ELF interactions. The corpus consists of 10 hours 47 minutes of spoken ELF interactions, which makes 93,913 words of transcribed data. The study was conducted with the voluntary participation of 79 incoming Erasmus students enrolled in 4 state and 6 foundation universities in Istanbul, representing 24 first languages (L1). These L1s are namely Arabic, Azerbaijan, Basque, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, Galician, German, Greek, Italian, Korean, Lithuanian, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Spanish, Suriname, Turkish and Ukrainian. Table 1 presents the distribution of the participants by L1s.

**Table 1. The Distribution of the Participants by L1s**

Native Languages	No. of Speakers
Arabic	2
Azerbaijan	1
Basque	1
Bulgarian	6
Cantonese	2

Chinese	1
Czech	4
Danish	1
Dutch	7
French	4
Gallician	1
German	19
Greek	2
Italian	7
Korean	3
Lithuanian	2
Mandarin Chinese	1
Polish	9
Portuguese	1
Slovak	2
Spanish	3
Suriname	1
Turkish	4
Ukranian	1

The age range of the students was 19-27. The majority of them were from Istanbul University. However, students from Yeditepe University and Bahçeşehir University also showed high participation in the study.

**Table 2. The Participation Rate of Students from Universities**

University	State/Foundation	Participants
Istanbul University	State University	33
Yeditepe University	Foundation University	16
Bahçeşehir University	Foundation University	15
Bilgi University	Foundation University	6
Yıldız Technical University	State University	3
Marmara University	State University	2
Sabancı University	Foundation University	1
Istanbul Technical University	State University	1
Arel University	Foundation University	1
Fatih University	Foundation University	1

The corpus is compiled by means of 54 speech events, 29 interviews and 25 focus group meetings. In the interviews, the participants were asked to answer 15 open-ended questions impromptu. In the focus group meetings, the participants were given a list of discussion topics and asked to choose a topic to discuss with their partners. The interviews were conducted face to face with one participant and the researcher. The focus group meetings, on the other hand, conducted with two participants from different language backgrounds. Before the main study, the speech events were piloted and necessary revisions were made in the data collection instruments. The main focus was to examine whether the topics and interview questions used in the speech events generated enough contexts for the specified lexico-grammatical structures to be analyzed in the study. For example, it was important to examine the number of occurrences of the third person present tense -s contexts in the interactions.

Then, the data collection process started and lasted for three months. The speech events were transcribed manually because the existing software programs were not able to convert ELF speech to text as they can only recognize the voices of native English speakers. While transcribing the corpus, VOICE transcription conventions were followed. After transcribing all the recorded data, the next step was the management and the analysis of the corpus. It is mostly analyzed manually, but the concordance analyses were performed with WordSmith Tools 6.0, a corpus analysis software.

### 3. Result

The results of the corpus analysis show that the case of 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero marking is also very common in Corpus IST-Erasmus, as proposed in previous ELF corpus studies. It reveals a total of 728 verbs in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular forms. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s represents 80%; whereas the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular zero represents 20% of all verbs in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular forms. Table 3 presents the number of occurrences of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s and 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero markings in the corpus.

**Table 3. The Use of 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Singular Verbs—Corpus IST-Erasmus**

<b>The use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s &amp; zero</b>			
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person -s</b>		<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person zero</b>	
Main Verbs	Aux. Verbs	Main Verbs	Aux. Verbs
<b>478</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>583 (80%)</b>		<b>145 (20%)</b>	

In order to investigate the case of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular zero marking in Corpus IST-Erasmus, the occurrences of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular marking were identified. The identified structures were then classified as 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s and 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero marking. Then, the occurrences of each 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs were counted. The results reveal that the occurrence of present simple tense verbs combined with 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular subjects is 728 in total. Out of these 728 occurrences, 583 of them are inflectionally marked, and

145 of them remain unmarked. The occurrences of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs are further categorized as main verbs and auxiliary (*does*, *doesn't*, *has got*, and *hasn't got*) verbs. It reveals that out of 617 main verbs in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verb forms, the occurrence of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s is 478, and the occurrence of 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero is 139. Besides this, out of 111 auxiliary verbs in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present forms, 105 of them are inflectionally marked (*does*, *doesn't*), and 6 of them are unmarked (*do*, *don't*). With respect to the distribution of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular markings, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s marking appear in each speech event in the corpus. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero marking, on the other hand, occur in 42 out of 54 speech events. The samples of zero marking can be seen below.

*Cases of 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero marking*

TIME1 (S1: Greek)

160 S1: we ha- we just you know this kind of stuff **happen** (.) in old cities especially  
161 the house is really really really old (1) and made of erm (.) er wood and it's

T8INT5 (S11: German)

165 everything: and she: (.) she went to me with er to the mobile shops and things  
166 like this so and we go out and she **show** me istanbul and (.) that's nice to live

T14ME4 (S17: Italian)

166 S17: o:h i have got a two sisters (.) the smaller one erm she's seventeen years old  
167 and of course she **use** facebook a lot (.) for everything for for (.) er read about his

T17INT11 (S23: Bulgarian)

175 (.) for erasmus one day when he (1) **go** to the university i I WILL TELL HIM do  
176 erasmus because it's a good thing (1) and yeah that's:

T20INT14 (S26: Italian)

58 S26: yes i think so <@>my girl my girlfriend always **say** no no no it's better  
59 french why english english is more complex but</@>

T27INT18 (S36: Turkish/German)

190 S36: but from time to time i force my mom to speak with me german because she  
191 were (.) erm (1) that employees she **work** with (.) they speak not a good german

T37ME14 (S50: Lithuanian)

9 everything (.) so it makes me: to SEE that there is different style of life which (.)  
10 really (.) **interest** me so much a:nd also for example different kind of language

T40INT24 (S56: French)

154 er:m</slow> (1) german at school but they don't speak together for example (1)  
155 my father: **speak** little bit (1) english and my mother: she can understand but (1)

T53ME24 (S77: Danish)

64 that's a really really good part of it but i think it **become** problematic when (.)  
65 when (.) when people just (.) when u:se it because it's so normal and you just you

T54INT29 (S79: Czech)

16 subjects (1) but for example phillip also **study** in another university in czech  
 17 public and they can choose (1) also in english

The results are in line with Breiteneder's (2009) study, which consists of 43,000 transcribed words. In the study, there are 151 occurrences of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verb forms; 126 of them are inflectionally marked, and 25 of them are unmarked. In other words, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s occurs 83%, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular zero occurs 17% of all verbs in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present forms. In Dewey's (2007a) ELF Corpus, which consists of 61,234 transcribed words of spoken discourse, the occurrence of zero marking in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verb forms, is even more extensive. While the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s occurs 48%, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular zero occurs 52% of all verbs in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present forms.

To provide insight into the ratio of the occurrences of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s and 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero, it is important to examine the linguistic contexts in which the verbs occur. Firstly, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero seems to be less affected by the linguistic context in which it appears compared to 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s. That is, the occurrences of 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero marking, as main verb, is 139 in the corpus, with 58 different verbs. However, the same level of variety does not appear for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s, as it occurs 478 times, with only 85 different verbs. In order to validate this preliminary observation, the most frequent 10 verbs that take 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s in the corpus are identified. It is interesting that half (50%) of all cases of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s occurring in main verbs, can be accounted for by only 6 verbs out of 85 verbs. These verbs are respectively *depends*, *interests*, *has*, *speaks*, *makes*, and *means*. Similarly, in Dewey (2007a, p. 86) ELF Corpus "... half of all cases of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s occurring in main verbs can be accounted for by only 4 verbs: *has*, *means*, *looks*, and *depends*". It seems that many of the instances of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s in main verbs are part of prefabricated chunks or fixed expressions, repetitions, or predetermined linguistic contexts.

**Table 4. Most Frequent 10 Verbs that Take 3<sup>rd</sup> Person -s—Corpus IST-Erasmus**

Verb	Frequency
depends	73
interests	48
has	38
speaks	36
makes	28
means	17
knows	13
seems	12
wants	12
comes	11



As can be seen in Table 4, out of 478 occurrences 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s marking as main verb, “depend” is the most frequent verb that takes 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s in the corpus. It appears 73 times with the ratio of 15%. The unmarked form of the verb, on the other hand, appears only 2 times, each uttered by the same speaker (S35: Polish). This high incidence of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s with the verb “depend” seems as a result of co-occurrence patterns. Figure 1 displays some examples from the concordance of “depends”.

N	Concordance
1	do children start school in your country it <b>depends</b> sometimes it depends on the level
2	in your country it depends sometimes it <b>depends</b> on the level of the education and
3	start school in the age of seven or six it <b>depends</b> on the birthday when the birthday
4	are at the age of six or seven and erm it <b>depends</b> most of the time you have to erm
5	some who start earlier or a bit later it <b>depends</b> erm on the birthday as well so
6	start school at seven six or seven years it <b>depends</b> on which part of the year they are
7	class mhm and this starts maybe at five it <b>depends</b> on the parents when they want to
8	if i have one i mean if i prefer one or it <b>depends</b> also from the experience you
9	the what age years night nine mhm but it <b>depends</b> also it depends also which what
10	night nine mhm but it depends also it <b>depends</b> also which what kind of
11	primary secondary university may it <b>depends</b> some university in italy but not
12	to study in valenciano and then also it <b>depends</b> if you study in some part of spain
13	levels it at all levels it's german but it's it <b>depends</b> because erm there are some
14	you can start at the age of five so it <b>depends</b> on the ch child on the child yes
15	in your schools well it's like er it's also <b>depends</b> what kind of university it is some
16	just english language and maybe france it <b>depends</b> on the school mhm and there's i'm
17	english eleven years old maybe twelve it <b>depends</b> yeah it depends what are the
18	old maybe twelve it depends yeah it <b>depends</b> what are the criteria to be
19	formally but for me it was pretty easy just <b>depends</b> on the faculty so your faculty has
20	good level of english mhm of course it <b>depends</b> on you if you want to study you
21	speak to you in german and french so it <b>depends</b> actually what the parents want
22	age do students start to learn english it <b>depends</b> also for me i started like studying
23	students start to learn english well erm it <b>depends</b> but not foster to learn english
24	also and at university it yeah kind of <b>depends</b> on what field of study you are
25	they then it's easy for you but it always <b>depends</b> so they do not ask any english
26	erm i started at the age of nine but erm it <b>depends</b> i think now it's earlier i think
27	sixty credits for be erasmus and also it <b>depends</b> on on the what is asking the
28	program in your country well erm it <b>depends</b> on the faculty you are in my
29	but i'm not i don't know exactly so it <b>depends</b> on which school sometimes they
30	go you have to have a good english but it <b>depends</b> by university in which you go for

Figure 1. The Concordance of “depends”—Corpus IST-Erasmus

The concordance of “depends” shows that the most common collocates of the verb “depends” are “it” and “on”. For example, out of 73 instances of “depends”, 51 of them collocates with “it” (e.g., “it depends”), 39 of them collocates with “on” (e.g., “depends on”) and 27 of them collocates with both “it” and “on” (e.g., it depends on). It seems that ELF speakers perceive “it depends”, “depends on” and “it depends on” as fixed phrases. The following sentences taken from the corpus are just a few of the examples that might support this assumption.

T17INT11 (S23: Bulgarian)

13 S23: of course **it depends on** you if you want to study (.) you <2>gonna do</2>  
 56 me (1) because (.) back in bulgaria (1) the thing that: (.) **make** me confused and  
 57 **make** me feel: (1) depressed is not the word <fast>but close to depressed</fast>

T22ME8 (S30: Italian)

5 don't know if i have one i mean if i prefer one or (.) **it depends** also: from the  
 79 only it it **generate** like some: inequality (1) a kind of inequality

T30ME10 (S40: Dutch)

47 S40: but i think **it depends on** a person because erm (2) yeah you have like older  
 60 S40: and he **act** like ten years younger than me so @@@

T38ME15 (S52: Ukrainian)

55 so (.) they: just (1) yeah (1) can kill them (1) but **it depends on** the: on the person  
 75 CANNOT BE the language of all culture (.) because every culture **have** their

As can be seen in the extracts taken from the corpus, speaker 23, 30, 40, and 52 use the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s marking for the verb “depend” shortly before they use 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular zero for the verbs “use, make, generate, act, exist”. Consequently, it can be assumed that “it depends”, “depends on”, and “it depends on” function as prefabricated chunks in the interactions and therefore restrict any variation of the word “depend”.

It is also important to note that the appearance of “interests” as the second most frequent verb that takes 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s is not very surprising. The linguistic contexts in which the verb “interest” occurs, are predetermined and therefore restricts any other variants of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular marking. It exists both in the interview questions and among the discussion topics used in the speech events.

#### Interview Question 10:

Of all the courses you are taking this term, which one interests you the most, and why?

#### Discussion Topic 5:

What interests you most in a foreign culture?

The following extract supports the assumption that participants mostly use the marked forms of the verbs in predetermined linguistic contexts, while they tend to use the unmarked forms for the same verbs in other linguistic contexts. For instance, speaker 50 in meeting 14 initiated the conversation by reading the discussion topic they had chosen from the list and used the marked form of the verb “interest”. Then, however, the same speaker used the unmarked form of the same verb.

T37ME14 (S50: Lithuanian)

S50: so: the question is (.) why **interests** you mo- (.) what **interests** you most in foreign culture traditions daily life food history blah blah blah et cetera so: (.) for me for example the reason why i came to turkey istanbul because i do believe that istanbul is like er erm main thing for (.) er traditions like and culture because it's totally different than i do have in my own country like lithuania (.) because

for example i'm christia:n a:nd i do belie- i do behave different (.) and here it's like (.) you can see girls who cover their face and different clothe:s and everything (.) so it makes me: to SEE that there is different style of life which (.) really (.) **interest** me so much a:nd also for example different kind of language.

Moreover, the use of the marked form of the verb “interest” as part of the predetermined interview questions also increased the number of -s marking.

T37INT1 (Researcher & S3: Spanish)

130 R: okay (.) er of all the courses you are taking this term

131 S3: mhm

132 R: which one **interests** you the most

133 S3: mhm

Finally, there were also some instances of repetitions in the corpus which multiplied the occurrence of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s marking. The speakers simply repeated the researcher or the other participants in the interactions.

T24INT15 (Researcher & S33: Arabic)

124 R: okay (1) er:m (2) of all the courses you are taking this term at 125 university

125 which one **interests** you the most (1) which course (1) which class <11> **interests**

126 you</11>

127 S33: <muttered to himself><11>which class</11> **interests** me the

128 most</muttered to himself> (1) there is a (1) two classes that **interests** me the

129 most first one (.) was financial management (.) because i want to study in finance

In this extract, speaker 33 simply repeats the question that is posed to him. Besides, shortly after the repetition, “interests” appears again in the same sentence but this time with a plural subject. This supports the assumption that the speakers tend to adhere to the verb forms used by the previous speakers in the interactions, which results in an increase in the ratio of the occurrences of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s.

On the other hand, there is a tendency among ELF speakers to overgeneralize the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s in contexts where it is not required. The number of unnecessary use of -s is 30 in the corpus. Their occurrences are not added to the total number of -s marking since the focus of the study is to investigate the contexts which require 3<sup>rd</sup> person verb forms in present simple tense. However, it is important to draw attention to overgeneralization of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s with a few examples.

T3ME2 (S4: Mandarin Chinese)

150 and just open it and (1) and sit (.) er in front of the computer (.) and and waiting?

151 when will the notification **shows** up (.) yeah so (.) before? i used to do that (.)

T20INT14 (S26: Italian)

85 a:nd my university my (.) business administration is good (1) the teacher are

86 really professional they: **speaks** very well in english (.) a:nd (1) and

T26INT17 (S35: Polish)

134 S35: and the culture is different (1) the: fami- families: are different (3) like in  
 135 my country (.) lots of people **wants** to: (1) have a (1) high grade in (1) business  
 T52ME24 (S75: Basque)

29 S75: but you know what's happen (1) in the model in which we are (1) in which  
 30 the final exams **takes** too much weight (.) of the: (1) mark of the course (.) like  
 T21ME7 (S27: German)

103 S27: but sometimes you just get you meet the person once and then you're friend  
 104 on facebook (.) and now in erasmus they always **posts** some stuff in their mother

As can be seen in the examples 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s is combined with plural subjects in simple present contexts. Moreover, it is used in contexts which are not in present simple tense as in the last extract.

Finally, when the prefabricated chunks, predetermined expressions, and repetitions are excluded from the overall statistics, the ratio of the morphologically marked 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs reduces. Besides, the occurrence of 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero marking is quite remarkable in the corpus. Thus, in line with ELF literature (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2004), it can be said that 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero is an emerging variant for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs in present simple tense in ELF interactions.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that zero marking for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present tense verbs is an emerging pattern in spoken ELF discourse as proposed in the previous studies (Seidlhofer, 2004; Dewey, 2007a; Breiteneder, 2009; Cogo & Dewey, 2012). According to the results, the number of contexts which require 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verb marking in the corpus is 728 in total. While the occurrence of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s marking in these contexts is 583, the occurrence of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero marking is 145. In other words, 80% of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verb forms are inflectionally marked, and 20% of them are unmarked. Besides this, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s usually appears in prefabricated chunks, repetitions, and predetermined linguistic contexts, indicating that the speakers' use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s marking is more often the result of using an already given, marked grammatical item. On the other hand, the speakers tend to use the unmarked forms in contexts that are unique. Also, they tend to overgeneralize the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s in non-obligatory contexts. Finally, it is also important to note that the omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s marking in required contexts does not affect the intelligibility in interactions among ELF speakers as there seemed to be no evidence of communication gaps.

The tendency to drop the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s marking might be interpreted with the markedness theory in second language acquisition. As Ellis (1997, p. 70) puts forward markedness refers to "*the general idea that some structures are more 'natural' or 'basic' than other structures. In typological linguistics, unmarked structures are those that are common in the world's languages*". For instance, as stated in Gass and Selinker (2008, p. 179):

If we consider words denoting professions, avocations, or societal roles, we see that male terms are the basic ones (e.g., *actor, poet, host, hero*), whereas the female counterparts have suffixes added on to the

male term (*actress, poetess, hostess, heroine*). The male term is taken to be the basic one (unmarked) and the female terms the marked derivative.

As Ellis (1997, p. 70) puts forward “*learners acquire less marked structures before more marked ones*”. The unmarked units are easier for second language learners to acquire. Also, as Gass and Selinker (2008, p. 180) state for a second language learner whose NL structure is more marked than the TL structure, the acquisition will be easier compared to a learner whose NL structure is less marked. In terms of markedness, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s is the morphologically marked form, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person zero is the unmarked form. Thus, the tendency among ELF speakers to drop the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s might result from its marked nature. It is, however, not possible to make generalizations just on the basis of markedness. The marking system for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbs in ELF interactions can be influenced by other factors. As any standard English focused teaching prescribes the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s marking as a rule, whose absence (in the learners’ minds) does not necessarily cause a lapse in meaning, the learners’ discovery of this may lead to a casual use where meaning making is not based on grammatical form.

Finally, the findings of such corpus studies cannot or should not always prescribe what is to be taught. But, it is necessary that language pedagogy “*refer to, but not defer to, linguistic descriptions*” (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 225). However, the majority of the current practices in ELT still insists on teaching mainly the standard varieties of English and has limited incorporation of ELF to ELT curriculum. Although there is a continuous increase in the use of ELF around the world, the teaching approaches, materials, and the assessment is still ENL-oriented. Native speakers are seen as the norm providers, while ELF speakers’ present or future communication contexts are disregarded (Jenkins, 2012, p. 487). As Seidlhofer (2011, p. 172) puts forward “*in the present globalized world, it is inappropriate to insist that standard ENL should enjoy privileged status as an international means of communication*”. With the increase in the number of empirical ELF studies, it has and will become more possible “*to move from programmatic statements to realizations in teaching practice*” (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 225).

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